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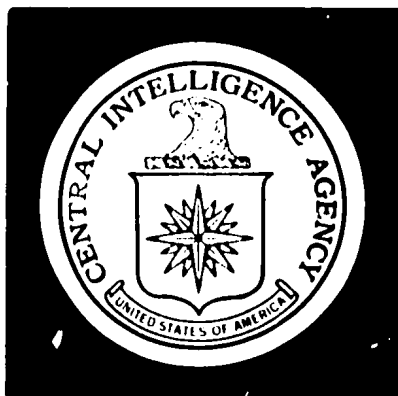
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**DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE**

Intelligence Memorandum

*The Force Levels, Capabilities, And Intentions
Of Communist Forces In Cambodia, 1971-72*

ARMY review completed.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
10 May 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Force Levels, Capabilities,
And Intentions Of Communist Forces
In Cambodia, 1971-72

Introduction

The purpose of this memorandum is to estimate the strength of Communist forces in Cambodia and to assess their capabilities and intentions over the course of the next 12-18 months. The analysis is focused primarily on the logistic and manpower constraints that might influence Hanoi's choice of strategic options over the period. Since many of the determinants that influence Hanoi's course of action are not quantifiable, this memorandum also presents a discussion of other factors in the perspective from which they may be viewed and weighed in Hanoi.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Economic Research with a contribution by the Office of Current Intelligence and was coordinated within CIA.

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I. The Enemy Force Structure in Cambodia

Nature of the Buildup

1. After the overthrow of Sihanouk, the Communist forces in Cambodia were built up with relative ease by drawing primarily on major division-size units already astride the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border and units then operating in the adjacent areas in GVN MRs 2, 3 and 4. Evidence indicates that in March 1970 the Communists had been preparing for a large-scale offensive to be conducted by the 5th VC, 7th NVA, and 9th VC Divisions against major targets in GVN MR 3. With the overthrow of the Sihanouk government, these plans were canceled and the units were targeted against Cambodia.

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2. Despite the deployment of large-size units, enemy operations in Cambodia have been characterized by small-unit actions involving probably no more than 10,000 VC/NVA combat troops. In addition, about 10,000 other VC/NVA combat troops have been engaged both in maintaining defensive positions and in recruiting, training, and propagandizing activities among the population and insurgent elements in Cambodia.

3. By June 1970 the commitment of enemy forces to Cambodia had more or less stabilized and the basic pattern of enemy force structure and deployment had emerged. At that time, we estimate that about 50,000 to 60,000 VC/NVA personnel were located in Cambodia, of which only about 20,000-25,000 men were in actual combat units. The remaining 30,000-35,000 troops were in administrative service units, concerned primarily with operating and protecting enemy command, logistic, and intelligence functions. The major concentrations of the enemy's combat forces were located in the Cambodian provinces adjacent to GVN MR 3. At least three regiments of the 7th NVA Division as well as the 174th Regiment remained near the border area but still did not appear to be

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committed to offensive activity within Cambodia. In the western area -- Siem Reap Province -- one regiment plus a newly formed regiment and elements of the 5th VC Division represented the only effective Communist threat. To the south of Phnom Penh, two to three regimental equivalents under the Phuoc Long Brigade* were able to maintain a viable military posture in the area. In the northeast area the Communist presence was limited to one regiment, dispatched earlier from GVN MR 2.

4. Through the last half of 1970, enemy military objectives emphasized protecting vital supply corridors, disrupting and exerting pressure on government of Cambodia lines of communication, and undertaking small-unit harrassments and attacks by fire on population centers. At the same time, efforts were under way to build a Communist political organization and to recruit indigenous personnel for military units. Throughout this period, there was no significant change in the disposition of combat units nor was there any noticeable effort to expand the combat force structure through the introduction of new units either from South Vietnam or North Vietnam. However, several battalions and at least one full regiment were formed from local personnel and ethnic Cambodians for use to some extent as fillers for VC/NVA combat units.

5. Throughout the first quarter of 1971, enemy military pressure leveled off as efforts were made to shore up the defensive positions protecting major supply corridors and depots. Subsequent to the Kompong Som and Route 6 and 7 offensives, the enemy had to commit as many as 11 regiments in reaction to the large-scale ARVN offensive launched in February against concentrations in the Chup Plantation area.

Current Enemy Strength and Disposition

6. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] we believe that little change has occurred in the size of its force structure. Enemy force levels, however, have been augmented by the influx of about 5,000 to 10,000 Khmer

* Later designated the Phuoc Long Front.

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Communist (KC) troops, raising the level of enemy forces to about 55,000 to 70,000 men, as shown below:

	<u>Thousand Troops</u>	
Combat forces	NVA/VC	20-25
	KC	5-10
		<u>25-35</u>
Administrative services	NVA/VC	30-35
<i>Total</i>		<i>55-70</i>

7. In line with existing tactics, the NVA have deployed most of their combat troops in MR 1, northeast of Phnom Penh in MR 5, and around and south-east of Phnom Penh in MR 2. This force consists of some 100 combat battalions, of which about 50 are VC/NVA maneuver battalions, 30 are VC/NVA combat support battalions, and some 20 are KC maneuver units. Over 50% of all battalions are located in MR 1 and southern MR 5. Similarly, most of the enemy's 30,000 to 35,000 administrative service troops are concentrated in these two military regions.

Infiltration

8. Although FANK and ARVN certainly have exaggerated the level of enemy losses, it is equally certain that enemy losses of combat forces have been heavy during the past year. Substance for this estimate can be found in the data on infiltration arrivals since enemy operations in Cambodia were initiated. For example, during the period April 1970 through June 1971, arrivals in the COSVN area are estimated at about 57,000 men -- 20,000 men during the last three quarters of 1970, 29,000 men during the first quarter 1971, and at least 8,000 men during the second quarter 1971.

9. Although COSVN's jurisdiction includes both GVN MRs 3 and 4, we believe that since April 1970 only a relatively small number of infiltrates have been infused as filler personnel into units operating in these two GVN military regions. We estimate

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that probably no more than 10,000 were so deployed (5,000 in each infiltration cycle). Consequently, it is likely that infiltration personnel destined for use in Cambodia will approximate 47,000 troops by the middle of this year.

10. With the exception of the 52nd NVA Regiment, which was infiltrated as a unit from southern Laos into southern Cambodia during January and February 1971, most infiltrates earmarked for deployment in Cambodia are believed to be filler personnel to upgrade and to provide replacements for existing VC/NVA units. When juxtaposed against evidence that shows little or no increase in enemy main force strength over the last year, this relatively high rate of infiltration may reflect enemy needs to compensate for losses incurred by its units. It seems unlikely, however, that enemy casualties were in the 40,000-man range. It is possible, therefore, that some of the infiltrates may have been used to flesh out existing combat units, to augment existing administrative service forces, and to expand its very thin force levels in Cambodian MRs 3 and 4. If this analysis is valid, it strongly suggests that while the enemy's military objectives in Cambodia may be limited, they certainly have been costly in terms of manpower and have required a steady flow of personnel from North Vietnam. Although burdensome, there is no indication that the enemy could not sustain a similar infiltration load through the 1971-72 dry season. Moreover, in terms of the strategic importance of maintaining a logistical lifeline through Cambodia, the enemy may view this as a small price, indeed.

Enemy Force Levels Through 1971 and After

11. It is likely that the size of the VC/NVA force structure in Cambodia will remain at its current level well into 1972. In terms of combat forces, augmentation from units now in GVN MRs 3 and 4 is unlikely. Enemy forces there are themselves feeling a manpower pinch, with only minor reinforcement in view. If anything, a shift in forces -- which would be relatively minor in any case -- could occur from Cambodia into southern South Vietnam to support enemy forces in the Seven Mountains/Three Sisters base in Chau Doc and Kien Giang Provinces. This base, which is an infiltration station for the principal enemy base in the Delta -- the U Minh

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Forest -- was the first in the Delta to be reinforced by the North Vietnamese in 1969. For the first time since April 1969 there are no main force units of regimental size or larger in the area.

12. It is likely that there will be a continued, although probably modest, growth in the size of the KC forces, unless FANK makes a greater effort than it has heretofore to challenge Communist activities in the countryside. The evidence is too fragmentary to cite hard figures, but it is clear that the Vietnamese Communists with the assistance of newly-infiltrated Cambodian cadre have been placing a high priority on recruiting and training an indigenous force. There are indications that Hanoi is attempting to improve coordination of the KC forces and their Vietnamese advisers as it attempts to move ahead with the difficult process of building a KC organization. There is increasing evidence, however, that the Communists have had serious problems with their Cambodian recruits, which may worsen. Mounting difficulties are evident in attempts to rally Cambodians to the VC/NVA banner under the guise of returning Sihanouk to power or ridding Cambodia of US invaders. Furthermore, there has been increasing evidence of disenchantment among existing KC units. For example, a recent rallier reported that of the some 1,500 Cambodians who undertook training last summer under the supervision of the VC 272nd Regiment near Chup, only 500 completed the course while the rest deserted. Finally, inherent Khmer antipathies toward the Vietnamese are being exacerbated by the insensitivities of the VC/NVA cadres.

II. Strategy Options

13. Several factors would appear to give the North Vietnamese an on-going capability to implement a wide variety of offensive tactics. These include the fact that the enemy force in Cambodia has in our judgment been maintained at least at the same strength as it was a year ago. The enemy force structure in Cambodia was also reinforced by the introduction of new units, [redacted] The Communist forces in Cambodia also have demonstrated a high degree of flexibility and the capability for fairly rapid redeployment of troops as the military situation warrants.

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14. In addition to the above manpower considerations, the Communist logistic system in Cambodia also appears to have a current capability to provide the logistic muscle needed to carry out more intensive levels of offensive activity. It is possible, for example, that the Communist forces in Cambodia at the end of 1970 may have had as much as 2,500 tons of ordnance remaining from the Chinese military deliveries through the port of Sihanoukville. Even if these stockpiles have been drawn down to a greater extent than we have estimated, the current level of logistic activity in northeast Cambodia is such that we estimate that the Communist forces would not be completely dependent on the forthcoming dry season to exercise a variety of offensive options. In sum, it is entirely possible that the enemy presently and with little forewarning could mount very impressive high points of combat activity in Cambodia.

15. We have, however, considered the situation wherein a decision by Hanoi to select from a number of optional strategies would be dictated by the capabilities of the logistic system in southern Laos during the 1971-72 dry season. To determine the possible manpower and logistic constraints in this situation, our

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analysis considers two variants: Strategy I, a low combat option assuming a continuation of the protracted warfare with its occasional high points in South Vietnam and Cambodia that was typical of 1970; and Strategy II, a high combat option assuming sustained multi-battalion offensive actions in Cambodia but with low combat levels in South Vietnam.

Manpower

16. The estimated force augmentations required to support the alternate strategies are shown in the tabulation below:

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	<u>Thousand Persons</u>					
	<u>Cambodia</u>	<u>MR 1</u>	<u>MR 2</u>	<u>MR 3</u>	<u>MR 4</u>	<u>Total</u>
Strategy I	25	35	23	17	15	115
Strategy II	45	35	23	17	15	135

The annual infiltration requirements for implementation of Strategies I and II, assuming that the enemy maintains total combat forces at current levels while augmenting its force structure and carrying out the strategies are estimated at 100,000 and 150,000 men, respectively. It should be noted that this estimate of infiltration requirements is in our model a maximum case. Hanoi has demonstrated consistently that it can continue its current low-profile warfare even though its forces are being allowed to erode. But even in this maximum case, the infiltration requirements appear well within enemy capabilities, with the buildup for Strategy II requiring about four months to complete.

Logistics

17. The table shows Communist logistic requirements during the next dry season to sustain varying levels of offensive capability in Cambodia -- that is, low combat, periodic high points, and high combat alternatives. To place the estimates in perspective, they can be compared with our current estimate of supply inputs into the Laos Panhandle of 295 to 370 tons daily. Assuming that the Communists move at least the same tonnage into the Panhandle next dry season, it is obvious that the three alternatives all fall below or well within the input range. The Communists need not even achieve the low end of the 295-370 ton daily input average next dry season to be in a position to implement the "low combat" or "high point" strategies before September 1972. Even to implement the "high combat" option will require that the Communists operate just above the lower limit of the range, a performance well within their capability. Such a performance, however, would mean that stocks would not be in place until the late stages of the dry season. For high combat prior to that time to be feasible, a performance substantially exceeding the low end of the input range will be necessary.

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Dry Season Flows Needed to Meet Requirements for
Sustained Offensive Operations Through
September 1972 a/

25X1	Area Supplied	Short Tons		
		Low Combat	High Points--Cambodia <u>b/</u>	High Combat--Cambodia <u>c/</u>
	Southern Laos	46,500	46,500	46,500
	Cambodia	2,738	3,413 - 3,713	6,750 - 8,550
	South Vietnam	17,338	17,100	17,100
	Total input requirement	66,600	67,013 - 67,313	70,350 - 72,150
	Daily input requirement (240 days)	278	279 - 280	293 - 301

- a. All of the requirement estimates include a 25% allowance for bomb damage assessment.*
b. Assumes stockpile buildup of one month's high combat resupply requirements.
c. Assumes stockpile buildup of six months' high combat resupply requirements.

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By operating at the midpoint of the 295-370 tons daily range, the Communists can build the capability for launching high combat much earlier -- probably around the middle of the dry season. On the other hand, if they operated near the high end of the input range the high combat option would be feasible even earlier in the season.

18. Two other considerations weigh heavily on Communist capabilities in Cambodia. Most important is the availability of supplies already cached in Cambodia. If the Communists are willing to draw down stocks substantially, it would allow them to shorten considerably the time required to prepare for sustained high combat in Cambodia. Second, the analysis just presented imposed a full year's logistic burden on an eight-month dry season. Whatever rainy season flow the Communists can muster would enhance their logistic position.

III. Probable Courses of Action

19. The previous analysis was made without reference to the effect of US troop withdrawals from South Vietnam over the next 12 months and to a number of other developments such as the relative deployments and effectiveness of ARVN or FANK troops during this time frame. All of these factors would weigh heavily in Hanoi's determination of the strategic options it might wish to follow. For the most part the impact of these factors on Hanoi's offensive options is not quantifiable. To the extent that some of them are, the quantification must await completion of analyses of projected FANK and ARVN deployments over the next 12 months.

20. In this section, we attempt a preliminary appraisal of how these factors might influence Hanoi's decision. Our basic assumption is that the US residual force by mid-1972 is below 50,000 and does not include combat troops. To this basic case, we have coupled four alternative assumptions regarding ARVN and FANK capabilities and intentions over the period. These alternative cases or scenarios are assessed in terms of Hanoi's likely courses of action. The only quantitative evaluation is in terms of the changes in manpower requirements for each scenario. These manpower

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estimates are highly tentative and must be regarded solely as approximate orders of magnitude.

Scenario 1. (a) There will be no change in ARVN's willingness to introduce forces into Cambodia either to reinforce Cambodian efforts against the enemy or to initiate offensives of its own, and (b) there will be no change in FANK's combat effectiveness.

Scenario 2. (a) ARVN will reduce its forces in Cambodia, and (b) FANK's combat effectiveness* will improve to the extent that it can launch mini-type offensives mainly in the form of increased numbers of harassing attacks on major enemy deployments.

Scenario 3. (a) There will be no change in ARVN's willingness to introduce forces into Cambodia either to reinforce Cambodian efforts against the enemy or to initiate offensives of its own, and (b) FANK's combat effectiveness will improve to the extent that it can launch mini-type offensives mainly in the form of increased numbers of harassing attacks on major enemy deployments.

Scenario 4. (a) ARVN will reduce its forces in Cambodia and (b) there will be no significant improvement in FANK.

21. Under the situation projected in Scenario 1, and assuming that there is no change in Communist strategy, the war in Cambodia by mid-1972 will closely adhere to the current tactical and strategic situation. FANK's combat activities will be restricted to defensive actions geared almost exclusively to maintaining its major lines of communication. For its part, ARVN will introduce forces in Cambodia both to assist FANK in keeping open strategic arteries (as in the cases of Route 6 and 4), and to blunt any sizable buildup of enemy forces along the border. In view of the assumed drawdown of US force levels, ARVN initiatives in Cambodia will be limited

* Assumes a well-trained army of about 150,000 men, of which 50,000 would be used in offensive, harassing operations.

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and the enemy almost certainly will continue to dominate the war there. Under these circumstances the enemy could view Strategy II with increasing favor. In addition to further strengthening his logistical system in Cambodia, an offensive in Cambodia could destroy FANK's budding military capabilities so as to delay considerably its emergence as an effective fighting force.

22. Moreover, against this alignment in which ARVN's initiatives would for the most part emphasize preventive reaction tactics and FANK's posture would be purely defensive, the enemy could reasonably consider undertaking a sustained offensive in Cambodia with somewhat less than the 45,000 combat troops originally postulated for the strategy. Although he almost certainly would have to upgrade his forces in Cambodian MRS 1 and 2, the enemy probably could leave his force levels elsewhere in Cambodia relatively constant. On this basis he might be able to implement Strategy II with a combat force structure of 35,000-40,000 men. Similarly, he probably could maintain the protracted war strategy with a combat force level of about 20,000 men, 5,000 fewer than originally postulated.

23. The improved combat effectiveness of FANK posited in Scenario 2, could affect Communist calculations. Heretofore, the enemy has viewed FANK as a minimum threat on its periphery. Consequently, he has been able to achieve his objectives with minimum force levels that have successfully tied down larger but untrained, poorly led FANK units. To the extent that FANK presents a viable military posture, the NVA will be forced to commit more and better troops to this theater of the war, if for no more than to maintain its existing positions. Even within this context, Hanoi probably would still view Strategy II favorably. Although implementation of the high combat option within the framework of Scenario 2 almost certainly would entail high casualties rates, Hanoi probably would be motivated by the fact that a continuing increase in FANK's fighting effectiveness would over the longer term be an intolerable burden and entail far greater risks.

24. Even under these conditions the North Vietnamese may consider a combat force structure of

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35,000-40,000 men sufficient to support the offensive. The reduction of an ARVN presence in Cambodia certainly would weigh heavily in this decision. Such a consideration, however, probably would not prevail under the low combat, protracted war option. The increased combat effectiveness of FANK might make the NVA increasingly cautious, and they would view any reduction in combat force levels that could jeopardize the maintenance of their logistical system as too risky.

25. For Hanoi, Scenario 3 certainly would have the most ominous overtones. For all practical purposes the NVA would be forced to fight a main war against an aggressive ARVN while at the same time being concerned by burgeoning aggressive forces to their rear -- something they have never faced before. Probing actions by FANK and full-scale offensives by ARVN could place their logistical lifeline under increasing pressure, and force the enemy to fall back to almost a defensive war in Cambodia. Even then, enemy casualties would increase and Hanoi probably would have to commit additional forces to counterbalance this double-barreled threat. Under these conditions, Hanoi probably would view the low combat option -- Strategy I -- as most strategically desirable until its forces are in a position to attack and neutralize FANK, which would still be the weakest link in the friendly force structure.

26. Combat manpower requirements to sustain the protracted war strategy would probably increase by about 5,000 men. The majority of the increase would be deployed in Cambodian MRs 1 and 5 where pressures on the logistical system would be the greatest on-going threat. There would be an even more dramatic increase in combat manpower requirements, on the order of 10,000 men, if the enemy attempted to implement the high offensive strategy. The ability of both FANK and ARVN to take a heavy toll of enemy attacking forces would be at the heart of this increase.

27. As Scenario 3 delineates serious problems for the enemy by mid-1972, Scenario 4 provides the singular most favorable conditions for him. Within this context, friendly forces will be incapable of undertaking new initiatives in Cambodia. To Hanoi

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the war in Cambodia will continue to be viewed as a minimum threat on its periphery and the situation would permit the commitment of more forces to the main war in South Vietnam. Under these circumstances, the NVA might perceive the low combat option as most desirable. This strategy would keep casualties at relatively low levels while the NVA positioned themselves politically and militarily to place primary emphasis on the war in South Vietnam. This highly favorable tactical and strategic environment could enable the NVA to support a protracted war strategy with even less than the 20,000 combat forces postulated in Scenario 1. In terms of the high combat option the enemy could view a maximum combat force of 35,000 men as more than adequate.

IV. The Communist View of Cambodia

28. It is now over a year since Sihanouk was ousted from power, and the fundamental outline of Communist strategy has become reasonably clear. The captured documents, the various COSVN directives, the statements of ralliers, [redacted]

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[redacted] and public statements in Hanoi and Peking all seemed to suggest that the North Vietnamese neither foresaw nor were working directly toward a quick or early overthrow of the Lon Nol government.

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29. Within days after Sihanouk's ouster, prudent North Vietnamese military commanders began to make adjustments along the border to accommodate the new politico-military situation. Bases were expanded, caches were moved deeper into Cambodia, and efforts to raise an indigenous Cambodian Communist force were intensified. As part of this effort, the Communists also undertook a wide range of attacks against Cambodian population centers between May and August of 1970. This action had a twofold purpose. It applied heavy political-psychological pressure on the new leaders in Phnom Penh in the hope that either they would adopt different policies or that other more accommodating leaders would be brought into power through some internal political upheaval. The attacks on the population centers also had a tactical purpose. It tied down Cambodian troops to defensive positions, while the Communists moved quickly to establish a presence in the countryside and began the difficult

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task of establishing new supply lines, organizing a political apparatus, and raising an indigenous military force for local security and other related activities.

30. The Communists have largely devoted the past dry season to a continuation of this effort. In almost every area of the country, Communist cadre and main force units have been devoting a considerable portion of their energies to building an organization in the countryside. As part of this effort, ethnic Cambodian Communists, most of whom have been in Hanoi for many years, were returned to Cambodia to assume control over the fledgling indigenous apparatus.

31. The evidence that is currently available suggests that this process is far from reaching a stage of development in which Hanoi can assume that it has adequately protected the western flank of its forces located along the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border without the diversion of significant numbers of its own combat troops. On the contrary, the Communists are having a tough time generating support among a Cambodian population that is outright antagonistic when it is not apathetic. At the same time, however, it seems unlikely that FANK's performance over the past six months has given the North Vietnamese reason to be alarmed that it will face in the next year a serious challenge from the west. On the political side, despite recent difficulties associated with Lon Nol's incapacitation, there are no signs of any early changes that would either significantly affect the performance of FANK or change Cambodia's fundamental policy with respect to the war. Under these circumstances, there does not appear to be any fundamental change in the situation in Cambodia that would either afford the Communists the opportunity for making disproportionate gains by adopting a more aggressive strategy or compel them to alter their course because of a significant shift in the military realities.

32. There are two important caveats to this prognosis. The realities of the situation in Cambodia are such that the Communists could create a military "crisis" at any time or place of their own choosing and without necessarily fulfilling the

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requirements that by definition constitutes a "high" military option in South Vietnam. In short, the Communists can militarily accomplish far more with far less in Cambodia than in South Vietnam. This being so, Hanoi might see Cambodia as a battlefield in which it could retain some elements of initiative in the Indochina war without running great risks of a major setback. A "major" offensive in Cambodia might throw into the question the efficacy of US support to Cambodia and help create the impression that the war in Indochina is far from over despite the progress that has been made in South Vietnam.

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